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Heffernan, C. (2022). State of the Field: Physical Culture. *History. The Journal of The Historical Association*, 107(374), 143-162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229x.13258>

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:

History. The Journal of The Historical Association

Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 22/01/2022

DOI:

[10.1111/1468-229x.13258](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229x.13258)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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State of the Field: Physical Culture

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Abstract

This article surveys the state of the field of physical culture within the discipline of history. Understood broadly as a society's interest in gymnasium and health cultures, physical culture has become a topic of increasing importance for historians, sociologists and performance scholars in the past two decades. Seen as a distinct field from sport history, works on physical culture have evolved from sporadic and one-off studies to nuanced discussions about the idealised body and its broader social message. As such, studies of physical culture have become excellent platforms for the often implicit ways in which body types have been used in discussions of race, nationalism, class, gender and medicine. Although studies of physical culture began over a century ago, the field has only recently begun to enjoy scholarly attention and, thereby, evolve.

I

Muscles matter. That is an admittedly curt statement, but it can be used as a fruitful opening for any discussion on physical culture. The term physical culture is not one that is still freely used outside academia. This was not always the case. At the beginning of the twentieth century, physical culture was the term used to label one's interest in weightlifting, going to the gym and increasing one's physical activity.¹ It is now used by historians to observe historical health and fitness movements from the nineteenth to roughly the mid-twentieth century in Europe, Asia and the Americas. This is to say nothing of the sociologists, and performance scholars who still use it in a contemporary setting.² In historical writing, the term physical culture is difficult to define, largely because it was applied to everything from aerobics to weightlifting and all that lay in between. Nevertheless, scholars have largely agreed on two key tenets. Physical culture is distinguishable from sport. Whereas sportsmen and women are concerned with scoring goals, winning medals and defeating opponents, physical culturists are often more focused on losing weight, gaining muscle, improving heart health, etc. This is not to say that the two worlds do not overlap (an Olympic weightlifter engages in both),

¹ Thomas E. Murray, 'The language of bodybuilding', *American Speech*, 59/3 (1984), pp. 195–206.

² Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews and Holly Thorpe (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Physical Cultural Studies* (Oxford, 2017).

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but rather that the motivations underpinning these activities usually differ. It was for this reason that Jan Todd labelled physical culture as a *purposive exercise*, one done for very definitive physiological means.³ Physical culture is thus often treated as a parallel, but distinct, world to sport. Historians have also settled on the assumption that the nineteenth-century, in particular, saw an explosion of interest in health cultures among individuals, organisations and states.⁴ Looking at the etymology of the phrase ‘physical culture’, it can be dated to at least the eighteenth century but spiked in popularity from roughly the 1880s to 1950s.⁵

This is not to say that the term was used unproblematically during this period. Depending on one’s place in the world, physical culture was used for very definitive and distinct reasons. In the United States, physical culture was often used to define recreational weight training cultures separate from the state. In communist societies, however, the term was often used to distinguish healthy, non-competitive and constructive physical activities from decadent, competitive and profit-driven capitalist sport.⁶ Fascist regimes in Italy and Germany, continuing the earlier nineteenth-century trend of nationalist gymnastics (such as the *Turnverein* movement), attempted to use state-endorsed physical culture to strengthen citizens, produce healthier generations, increase patriotism, etc. In Britain, sport and physical culture could be used interchangeably, with some enthusiasts claiming that their sport was physical culture.

Returning to the opening sentence: muscles matter. The natural response is to question why this is the case for historians. Over the past three decades, historians have studied physical culture across multiple countries and time periods. In doing so, they have been able to uncover broader societal trends relating to health, gender, class, race, sexuality, entrepreneurship and politics. A brief example will demonstrate this. In 1889, a Prussian-born strongman, Eugen Sandow, travelled from Belgium to London to compete against a fellow strongman, Sampson, in a weightlifting contest. This contest became the talk of London sporting circles and, in the contest’s aftermath, propelled Sandow into mainstream culture. Sandow, a former travelling circus performer, became a sought-after health expert. In the early 1890s he embarked on the first of several world tours to the United States, where he appeared in one of the first Thomas Edison films. Returning to England, Sandow created one of the world’s first physical culture magazines, hosted what many credit as the

³ Jan Todd, *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women, 1800–1870* (Macon, 1998), pp. 2–3.

⁴ Jürgen Martschukat, ‘The necessity for better bodies to perpetuate our institutions, insure a higher development of the individual, and advance the conditions of the race. Physical culture and the formation of the self in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century USA’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 24/4 (2011), pp. 472–93.

⁵ Jan Todd, ‘Reflections on physical culture: defining our field and protecting its integrity’, *Iron Game History*, 13/2 (2015), pp. 2–8, at p. 5.

⁶ Petr Roubal, *Spartakiads: The Politics of Physical Culture in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Chicago, 2020).

first bodybuilding show in 1901, sponsored nutritional supplements and established a 'Curative Institute' of physical culture which promised to treat illnesses through exercise. During the Great War Sandow trained prospective British troops interested in enlisting while simultaneously challenging accusations that he was a German spy. He died from a suspected brain haemorrhage in 1925.⁷ Surveyed in this way, Sandow's life intersected with leisure, sport, commerce, visual cultures, race, gender, medicine and politics. Sandow's example is one of many. Scholars interested in interwar Europe have likewise used Russian, German and Italian state-sponsored exercise as a means of unpacking issues related to national sovereignty, eugenics, geopolitics, authoritarianism and health.⁸ Whether one looks at the personal or the political – to use two very broad categories – muscles matter.

The purpose of this article is not to categorise the multiple ways in which 'muscles matter' but rather to discuss the evolution of physical culture as a historical field. To use some of the parlance of the time, physical culture was once a 'thirty-pound weakling' in historical circles but has, in the past two decades, become a strong and robust area of research. In doing so, the article surveys the field's early origins, its establishment in cultural and social history and a more recent proliferation of research that has challenged historians to engage with issues of race, sexuality and commerce. Returning to Sandow, his last monograph, *Life is Movement* starkly stated that:

Civilisation has, indeed, become a slaughtering-car crowned by a grinning effigy of Comfort, before which man blindly and voluntarily hurls himself in his own ignorance ...⁹

The comforts and ignorance cited by Sandow stand in stark contrast to the study of physical culture, which, as will become clear, is as lively and as strong as Sandow once was.

II

Physical culture benefits greatly from its varied and interdisciplinary nature. Situated on the boundaries of sport history, physical education, history, movement science and sociology, it is possible to find historical works on exercise in a number of different disciplines. Some of the first historical studies on physical culture can be dated to the early nineteenth century when physical educationalists in the United States, such as Fred Eugene Leonard, attempted to historicise his society's interest in

⁷ David L. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding* (Chicago, 1994).

⁸ This is not just confined to the first half of the twentieth century. Richard Mills, 'Laying the foundations of physical culture: the stadium revolution in socialist Yugoslavia', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 34/9 (2017), pp. 729–52.

⁹ Eugen Sandow, *Life is Movement the Physical Reconstruction and Regeneration of the People (a Diseaseless World)* (London, 1919), p. 145.

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physical activity.¹⁰ Leonard's scholarly efforts were complemented by public studies in the 1930s and 1940s on the strong men and women of the late nineteenth-century as well as those from previous decades chronicling the popularity of gymnastics at the dawn of the nineteenth century.¹¹ Beyond anglophone writers French physical culturist Edmond Desbonnet's 1911 history *Les Rois de la Force* chronicled the early history of mainland European physical culture in the form of weightlifters and strength athletes.¹² Desbonnet was not a historian but rather a fitness entrepreneur interested in his field. His example was followed by Indian physical culturist D. C. Mujumdar, editor of physical culture magazine *Vyam*. In 1950, Mujumdar collected several articles to produce *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Physical Culture*, which sought to preserve the history of Indian practices in the face of Western exercise programmes coming to India.¹³

While many of the books written by enthusiasts should be treated with caution, especially in their often uncritical claims, they nevertheless established a stream of public history which continues to this day.¹⁴ Sticking, however, with academia, several early research projects are worth highlighting. The first is art historian Fridolín Macháček's 1938 article on the Sokol movement of Czechoslovakia and its contribution to gymnastics as a whole.¹⁵ Macháček's study shed light on a movement that, although popular in mainland Europe, was largely ignored in favour of studies on Ling or Turner gymnastics in the anglophone literature. Much of this early literature came from physical educationalists or those interested in the craft. Hence, Norma Schwendener's 1942 *A History of Physical Education in the United States* or Oswald Holmberg's study on Pehr Henrik Ling.¹⁶ Included in this vein was Peter McIntosh's *Landmarks in the History of Physical Education* (published in 1957). McIntosh's work gave an excellent overview of the overall health climate of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thereby providing an institutional (in this case schools') perspective on health cultures in Britain.¹⁷ In 1967 Terence 'Terry' Todd completed a doctoral dissertation entitled 'The history of resistance exercise: and its role in United States education'. The first dissertation on the history of American physical culture (as opposed to physical education), Todd's doctoral work detailed the history of strongmen and strongwomen as well as broader societal trends towards

¹⁰ Fred Eugene Leonard, *A Guide to the History of Physical Education* (Los Angeles, 1923).

¹¹ Early examples include George F. Jowett, *Louis Cyr: The Strongest Man That Ever Lived* (Philadelphia, 1927) and Charles T. Trevor, *Sandow the Magnificent* (New York, 1946).

¹² Edmond Desbonnet, *Les Rois de la Force* (Strasbourg, 1911).

¹³ D. C. Mujumdar, *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Physical Culture* (Baroda, 1950).

¹⁴ Todd, 'Reflections', pp. 4–6.

¹⁵ Fridolín Macháček, 'The Sokol movement: its contribution to gymnastics', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 17/49 (1938), pp. 73–90.

¹⁶ Norma Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States* (New York, 1942); Oswald Holmberg, 'Per Henrik Ling: his life and gymnastic principles', *Physical Educator*, 1/2 (1940), pp. 77–82.

¹⁷ Peter C. McIntosh, *Landmarks in the History of Physical Education* (London, 1957).

health.¹⁸ It marked the beginning of Todd's lifelong contribution to the field. Terry and his partner Jan Todd established the H. J. Lutchter Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sport Studies at University of Texas Austin, which, from its establishment in 1983, became the west's first physical culture archive.¹⁹ From the Soviet perspective V. V. Stolbov and I. G. Chudinov's 1970 *Istoriya fizicheskoy kultury* (or 'History of Physical Culture') gave a useful overview of Soviet physical culture, as did Jonathan Kolatch's doctoral work on sport and physical culture in China.²⁰

Major works on gymnastics and health cultures more broadly emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Influential in this regard was Eugen Weber's 1971 article 'Gymnastics and sports in *fin-de-siècle* France: opium of the classes?' in *The American Historical Review*.²¹ Weber's article attempted to answer why people engaged in physical activity and stressed the importance of movement to the state and nationalism. Equally important was Bruce Haley's *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (1978), which explored the ideological construction of health in Victorian England and the efforts individuals were often pressured to take in order to achieve it.²² Likewise, real richness was found in studies of Soviet physical culture. James Riordan's 1977 *Sport in Soviet Society* showcased the important role that sport and physical culture played in both shaping and expanding the Soviet Union's social and political identity. This was the culmination of several years' research, which had found its way into sport history journals.²³ Importantly for later works, Riordan's study made clear the importance of women in physical culture discourses. Whereas in other nations, like France, Germany or Britain, female physical culture tended to understand women's physical culture as a means of creating healthier mothers, Soviet physical culture extended female physical culture to women's role as workers. Riordan's book contrasted contemporary works focusing on British physical education such as Sheila Fletcher's *Women First* (1984) or Kathleen McCrone's *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women* (1988), both of which discussed the tensions which existed in British conceptions of adequate women's exercise and its

¹⁸ Terence Colquitt Todd, 'The history of resistance exercise and its role in United States education' (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1966).

¹⁹ John D. Fair, 'HJ Lutchter Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports', *Journal of Sport History*, 40/3 (2013), pp. 483–7.

²⁰ V. V. Stolbov and I. G. Chudinov, *Istoriya fizicheskoy kultury* (Moscow, 1970); Jonathan Kolatch, 'The development of modern sports and physical culture in China' (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970).

²¹ Eugen Weber, 'Gymnastics and sports in *fin-de-siècle* France: opium of the classes?', *The American Historical Review*, 76/1 (1971), pp. 70–98.

²² Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1978).

²³ James Riordan, 'Pyotr Franzevich Lesgaft (1837–1909) the founder of Russian physical education', *Journal of Sport History*, 4/2 (1977), pp. 229–41; James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge, 1977).

presumed effects.²⁴ In effect this extended to improving women's ability to be mothers, with little conception of their role outside the home.

Gender was, and remains, an important area in this field. In 1990 Patricia Vertinsky's work, *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, scrutinised nineteenth-century medical thoughts on women's bodies and women's exercise.²⁵ Vertinsky's work, which complemented work by Martina Verbrugge on the nineteenth century, made clear the pathway between gender and exercise.²⁶ Both explained how reductive ideas about the female body's presumed frailty were used to reinforce patriarchal ideas. Another work on women's physical culture came soon after in the form of Jan Todd's 1997 work *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful*.²⁷ Such works made clear the ability physical culture exercises had to reaffirm, but also challenge, restrictive ideas about women's bodies. The exception to this was, of course, those studies on Soviet, and at times fascist, physical culture which tended to discuss the role physical culture played for women as mothers but also workers and citizens. On masculinity, later comments by George Mosse on the masculine connections with physical culture were expanded on in the works of David Chapman and John Fair, in particular.²⁸

Riordan's work was an indication that large social histories of health and fitness were possible in other countries. In 1982 James Whorton published *Crusaders for Fitness*, which sought to detail, for the first time, nineteenth-century America's obsession with both alternative medicine and physical culture.²⁹ Whorton's subsequent works on complementary and alternative health have stressed the overlaps between these fields and physical culture.³⁰ Four years after Whorton's work, Harvey Green's monograph *Fit for America* was published.³¹ Where Whorton used a biography-led approach, Green's work focused on socio-cultural trends which sought to identify and solve health concerns. Whorton and Green's works were remarkable in their scope, examining issues related to social class, gender, nationalism and even food. Even more important was their generally positive reception from other historians, which helped, in some

²⁴ Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870–1914* (London, 1988); Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880–1980* (London, 1984).

²⁵ Patricia Anne Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1990).

²⁶ Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Oxford, 1988).

²⁷ Todd, *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful*.

²⁸ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 1998); John D. Fair, and David L. Chapman, *Muscles in the Movies: Perfecting the Art of Illusion* (Columbia, MO, 2020).

²⁹ James Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton, 1982).

³⁰ James Whorton, *Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America* (Oxford, 2004).

³¹ Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (New York, 1986).

part, to legitimise a field often defined by its study of circus strongmen and women.³²

The late 1980s and early 1990s can largely be defined as a period of chronicling and rediscovery. In chronicling the history of American physical culture nothing was more influential than *Iron Game Magazine* (IGH). Founded by Jan and Terry Todd in 1990, IGH helped create a baseline of knowledge for historians.³³ Equally important was David Chapman's 1994 biography *Sandow the Magnificent*, which recounted the life of Eugen Sandow, the man whom many regard as the 'father of modern bodybuilding'.³⁴ The first book to scrutinise Sandow's career academically, Chapman's research remains a cornerstone for the multitude of Sandow articles and books published in its wake. Chapman detailed Sandow's ideological importance as the 'world's most perfectly developed specimen' and explained how Sandow capitalised on this title financially through shrewd, and at times outlandish, enterprises. Other influential biographies from the 1990s included John Fair's *Muscle town USA*, which told the story of American barbell entrepreneur Bob Hoffman, and his influence over twentieth-century American weightlifting.³⁵ These books touched upon the commercial acumen of both men and the reasons why they were successful. In doing so, both cited new expectations of the white male body in the twentieth century wherein large and visible muscles became informal markers for ambition, discipline and virility.

Returning to Europe, focus was still being given to physical culture, albeit as a secondary concern to sport. James Riordan continued to publish on Soviet physical culture and its multifaceted nature. In particular, a still under-cited paper on the development of sport medicine in the Soviet Union and Germany highlighted the reach that the Soviet Union's broader ethos of physical culture had in society.³⁶ On Soviet physical culture, Victor Peppard's 1982 article in *Quest* did an excellent job in explaining the social and political differences inherent in Soviet exercise to kinesiologists.³⁷ Much like Riordan, Peppard emphasised the role of physical culture in critiquing the bourgeois and capitalist system of the Soviet Union's rivals. Works also began to emerge during this period on fascist regimes of physical culture in Italy and Germany, such as Michael H. Kater's *Doctors under Hitler* or Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight* on

³² Fakery in physical culture has yet to be fully explored by historians.

³³ Terry Todd and Jan Todd, 'Editorial: a statement of purpose', *Iron Game History*, 1/1 (1990), pp. 1–2.

³⁴ Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*.

³⁵ John D. Fair, *Muscle town USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell* (University Park, PA, 1999).

³⁶ Jim Riordan, 'Sports medicine in the Soviet Union and German Democratic Republic', *Social Science and Medicine*, 25/1 (1987), pp. 19–26.

³⁷ Victor E. Peppard, 'The Soviet critique of sport and physical culture', *Quest*, 34/1 (1982), pp. 23–33.

Italy among others.³⁸ Such works were followed by Victoria de Grazia's study of fascism and womanhood in Italy and several excellent articles on German racial hygiene, gymnastics and physical culture.³⁹

Comments on state physical culture were generally limited to the study of fascism or communism in the interwar period. One exception was Michael Anton Budd's work *The Sculpture Machine*, which explored the rise of the physical culture movement in the late nineteenth century. Budd's work built on Chapman's biography of Sandow to provide a broader social and cultural history of the *fin-de-siècle* interest in gymnasium cultures. Budd examined the visual culture of physical culture, thereby arguing that the desirability of the muscular body was influenced by a broader societal appreciation of modernity, technology and mastery.⁴⁰ Budd's 1997 work serves as an unusual, but admittedly imprecise, cut-off date for the early study of this field. The reasons underpinning this choice stem from the coherence of works published in the early 2000s and 2010s. The works following Budd largely stemmed from an interest in the political use of physical culture for a variety of purposes. Prior to this point, work on physical culture, although often excellent, was scattered. One historian wrote a book on Eugen Sandow, the other on women's physical culture in the nineteenth century and so on. Books or articles rarely spoke to, or against, one another.

III

The turn of the twenty-first century marks a moment when sustained scholarly interest in the socio-cultural and political importance of physical culture grew. Such work was dedicated to exploring physical culture in different nations, and different periods. While some like Annette Hoffman, whose 2004 edited collection discussed the transnationalism of the *Turnen* movement in the United States, situated itself in the early to mid-nineteenth century, far more focused on the *fin de siècle* period onwards.⁴¹ Slowly, it became possible to compare the histories of different countries when it came to physical culture. Building on previous work, this new wave still focused on the lived experience of physical culture, the social history, but combined it with a study of politics, gender and

³⁸ Michael H. Kater, *Doctors under Hitler* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922–1943* (Chapel Hill, 1985). See also E. A. Wright, 'Education, sport and militarism: fascist Italy and Nazi Germany' (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 1980).

³⁹ Arnd Krüger, 'There goes this art of manliness: naturism and racial hygiene in Germany', *Journal of Sport History*, 18/1 (1991), pp. 135–58; Michael Krüger, 'Body culture and nation building: the history of gymnastics in Germany in the period of its foundation as a nation-state', *The International Journal in the History of Sport*, 13/3 (1996), pp. 409–17; Gertrud Pfister, 'The medical discourse on female physical culture in Germany in the 19th and early 20th centuries', *Journal of Sport History*, 17/2 (1990), pp. 183–98.

⁴⁰ Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire* (New York, 1997).

⁴¹ Annette R. Hofmann, *Turnen and Sport* (Münster, 2004).

globalisation. An important text in this regard is Mary Lynn Stewart's 2001 *For Health and Beauty*, which focused exclusively on French women's physical culture from the late nineteenth century to the interwar period. Stewart's research located the role exercise and diet had in the creation of female beauty norms.⁴² A similar text, focusing on masculinity, was Caroline Daley's *Leisure and Pleasure*, which focused on physical culture in twentieth-century New Zealand.

Daley's work showcased the success strongman Eugen Sandow had in establishing business enterprises in the empire, be it Australia, New Zealand or India, with his base in London. Exploring how and why Sandow, and others, were able to do this, Daley's work discussed the strength of eugenics, commercialism and new fears about the physical body.⁴³ Combined, such influences helped drive the local and global interest in physical culture. Such trends were not unique to New Zealand, as Francois Cleophas's work on South Africa made clear.⁴⁴ Similar trends were also found outside European history. Andrew Morris's *Marrow of the Nation* (2004) discussed the complex history of sport and physical culture in Republican China. Like Daley, Morris examined the interplay between anglophone messages on physical culture and peoples outside Europe. Here, Morris made clear the limits of European physical culture, as well as its influence, over Chinese practices and messages.⁴⁵ Morris's work was particularly important in affirming that the socio-cultural importance of the trained body was not a European phenomenon.

Susan Brownell and Nicholas Schillinger, also studying Chinese physical culture, have both cited the dichotomy between individual and state physical culture and cited, in intricate detail, the ways in which physical culture was used in efforts to embody attitudes desired by the ruling class.⁴⁶ While such findings were also grounded in works on European physical culture, Chinese physical culture had the added dimension of tensions between local and western concepts of physical culture. This was a rather nuanced relationship. As Brownell's work explained, mimicry of European or Western physical culture was often controversial and contentious, especially in areas with a rich local tradition. Research on Asian and African physical culture is still somewhat limited compared to Europe, but excellent works exist on

⁴² Mary Lynn Stewart, *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s–1930s* (Baltimore, 2001).

⁴³ Caroline Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure: Reshaping and Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900–1960* (Auckland, 2003).

⁴⁴ Francois Johannes Cleophas, 'Exploring an unmapped physical culture landscape in colonial South Africa', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 37/14 (2021), pp. 1423–42.

⁴⁵ Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Los Angeles, 2004).

⁴⁶ Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (Chicago, 1995); Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Art of Governing Soldiers* (Maryland, 2016).

India, Laos, Kenya, Egypt and the Ottoman empire.⁴⁷ Simon Creak's study of Laotian physical culture in the twentieth-century echoed Morris in dissecting tensions between local and global physical culture messages alongside the political value of physical culture for authoritarian regimes.⁴⁸ This was also the case with Wilson Chacko Jacob's work on Egypt and Murat Cihan Yildiz's research on the Ottoman empire.⁴⁹ The breadth of such work defies neat or easy summaries. Instead, it is worth stressing the richness of research which has grounded itself within broader religious, political and gendered histories. Physical culture in these countries was often a battleground between local and global body ideals and behaviours.

Since the 1980s, scholars have used sport, and occasionally physical culture, to study India's position within the British empire.⁵⁰ At the heart of many of these physical culture works is the issue of globalisation and transnationalism. In 2006, anthropologist Joseph Alter published an article on Indian clubs and the British empire. Best described as the practice of swinging heavy clubs around the body, the clubs had a long history in India. In the nineteenth century they came to the attention of a British army general, who brought them to England. From there they became a popular exercise fad in Britain, America and parts of Europe. Alter's research, which underpinned several later studies on Indian clubs, examined first the gendered nature of this practice, and then the global pathways which facilitated its move from India to England.⁵¹ While Alter's work focused on the first half of the twentieth century, Carey Watt's later research on Eugen Sandow's tour of India in the 1900s found similar patterns, as did Mark Singleton's work on yoga.⁵² Singleton's *Yoga Body* is particularly interesting in this regard. Studying yoga from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Singleton examined how European callisthenic systems (in the vein of the Ling or Turner system) came to influence the kinds of yogic practices popularised in Europe and

⁴⁷ Elliott Goldberg, *The Path of Modern Yoga: The History of an Embodied Spiritual Practice* (London, 2016); Simon Creak, *Embodied Nation: Sport, Masculinity, and the Making of Modern Laos* (Honolulu, 2014); Matthew Carotenuto, 'Grappling with the past: wrestling and performative identity in Kenya', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 30/16 (2013), pp. 1889–902; Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt* (Durham, NC, 2011); Murat Cihan Yildiz, 'Strengthening male bodies and building robust communities: physical culture in the late Ottoman empire' (PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015).

⁴⁸ Creak, *Embodied Nation*.

⁴⁹ Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*; Yildiz, 'Strengthening male bodies'.

⁵⁰ John Rosselli, 'The self-image of effeteness: physical education and nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal', *Past and Present*, 86 (1980), pp. 121–48.

⁵¹ Joseph S. Alter, 'Indian clubs and colonialism: Hindu masculinity and muscular Christianity', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46/3 (2004), pp. 497–534.

⁵² Carey A. Watt, 'Cultural exchange, appropriation and physical culture: strongman Eugen Sandow in colonial India, 1904–1905', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 33/16 (2016), pp. 1921–42. See also; Sebastian Conrad, 'Globalizing the beautiful body: Eugen Sandow, bodybuilding, and the ideal of muscular manliness at the turn of the twentieth century', *Journal of World History*, 32/1 (2021), pp. 95–125. Mark Singleton, *Yoga body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford, 2010).

the United States. Traditional exercises were not replaced wholesale but were combined with newer movements in a hybrid system.

Building on James Riordan's 1977 work, studies on Soviet physical culture have continued to inform political and geographical research. Mike O'Mahony and Susan Grant both explored how physical culture served as a tool for governing parties during the twentieth century and as a means of preparing for battle.⁵³ Aware of the dangers in presenting physical culture as a disciplinary regime exerted on 'docile bodies', the authors balanced their studies with an examination of individual acts of resistance or inertia through physical culture towards these regimes.⁵⁴ Soviet physical culture, as noted previously, operated in a slightly different world from that of American physical cultures or older systems of gymnastics. American physical culture in the first half of the twentieth century was arguably unique in the prevalence given to bodybuilding and weightlifting cultures. Older gymnastic lineages existed but were often secondary to the popularity of physical education and physical culture.⁵⁵ In France and Germany, in particular, older nineteenth-century gymnastic traditions (like the Ling or Turner system) tended to influence newer notions of physical culture. Prior to the fascist appropriation of physical culture, however, it was largely a social or educational concern. In the Soviet Union, physical culture was used by the state to distinguish Soviet citizens from their capitalistic counterparts, and to strengthen bonds to Soviet ideals. This also explains why studies on Yugoslavia, and doctoral work on Poland, has tended to emphasise the role physical culture was presumed to play in the Soviet political system.⁵⁶

Soviet physical culture was never all-consuming and, indeed, Susan Grant's work has plenty of examples in which citizens disregarded, or cynically used, physical culture as espoused by the state and state bodies.⁵⁷ The tension between aspirations and reality or government control and individual experience has likewise been found in studies examining the fascist physical culture regimes of Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Michael Hau has routinely showcased the intermingling of fascist, and non-fascist, physical cultures in Germany. Hau, building on previous comments by George Mosse, did not depict the Nazi use of the body as a break from previous trends, but rather as an intensification.⁵⁸ Some, like

⁵³ Mike O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture – Visual Culture* (New York, 2006); Susan Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society: Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s* (London, 2012).

⁵⁴ On docile bodies in fitness see Kristi A. Allain, and Barbara Marshall, 'Foucault retires to the gym: Understanding embodied aging in the third age', *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement*, 36/3 (2017), pp. 402–14.

⁵⁵ Again, see Hofmann, *Turnen and Sport*.

⁵⁶ Richard Mills, 'Laying the foundations of physical culture: the stadium revolution in socialist Yugoslavia', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 34/9 (2017), pp. 729–52; N. Mathur, 'Women and physical culture in modern Poland' (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 2001).

⁵⁷ Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society*.

⁵⁸ Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890–1930* (Chicago, 2003); George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 1998).

Heikki Lempa, partly traced the roots of Nazism in the classical gymnast movements of nineteenth-century Germany.⁵⁹ The ability to control the body, to secure the strength of future generations and improve ‘racial fitness’ were part of European discourses long before the Nazi rise to power. There is also some evidence to suggest this was also the case in Salazar’s Portugal during the 1930s, although much more research on Spanish and Portuguese physical culture is needed.⁶⁰ Not everyone has focused on the interwar period. Claire Nolte’s study of the Sokol movement in Czechoslovakia studied this form of physical culture and its interactions with the nation’s cultural identity up to the outbreak of the Great War.⁶¹

Another well-known physical culture history in democratic countries is Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s (2010) book on British physical culture. Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s research highlighted the very peculiarised nature of health in Britain, which was simultaneously concerned with both domestic and colonial health.⁶² In particular, Zweiniger-Bargielowska explained the politicisation of physical culture in Britain with reference to concerns about degeneration and Britain’s geopolitical rivals. From the 1930s, numerous British governments expressed the need to intervene in public health with the proviso that they did so on democratic lines. The reasoning underpinning these decisions was that unlike her fascist rivals, Britain was a democratic nation. Citizens could be encouraged to exercise, but not compelled. Thus, legislation like the 1937 Physical Training and Recreation Act was enacted to fund sports clubs, radio exercise classes and improve infrastructure.⁶³ Guided by supposed democratic principles, Britain’s physical culture interest was no less inspired by the eugenic drives of mainland Europe, a point evidenced by the creation of the Women’s League of Health and Beauty. Founded in London in 1930, the League was run by and for women interested in improving ‘racial fitness’ across the empire.⁶⁴

Published soon after Zweiniger-Bargielowska’s research was Joan Tumblety’s study of physical culture in interwar and Vichy France. Tumblety was not the first author to examine French physical culture, but her *Remaking the Male Body* (2012) was the first to dissect fully the varied political overlaps in French health.⁶⁵ Physical culture began

⁵⁹ Heikki Lempa, *Beyond the Gymnasium: Educating the Middle-Class Bodies in Classical Germany* (Lanham, 2007).

⁶⁰ Ryan Murtha, Conor Heffernan and Thomas Hunt, ‘Building American supermen? Bernarr MacFadden, Benito Mussolini and American fascism in the 1930s’, *Sport in Society*, 24/11 (2021), pp. 1941–55.

⁶¹ Claire Nolte, *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914: Training for the Nation* (New York, 2002).

⁶² Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880–1939* (Oxford, 2012).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 279–90.

⁶⁴ J. J. Matthews, ‘They had such a lot of fun: the Women’s League of Health and Beauty between the wars’, *History Workshop Journal*, 30/1 (1990), pp. 22–54.

⁶⁵ Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford, 2012).

a point of focus for French groups across the political spectrum who, although often fiercely opposed to one another, coalesced on the need to train and strengthen the body. Like Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Tumblety's research discussed the porous nature of the public and political interest in physical culture. Public entrepreneurs, which in the French case meant people like Edmond Desbonnet, espoused the need for French men and women to strengthen their bodies, to give birth to strong children and to maintain their athleticism. Such messages fitted neatly with various groups in France seeking to use the strong, fit and 'modern' body for their own purposes.⁶⁶

The Physical Training and Recreation Act was not the sole focus of Zweiniger-Bargielowska, but it proved central in Charlotte Macdonald's subsequent work. Studying the British empire, Macdonald's work explored the similarities and differences between Britain and its dominions from the 1930s to 1960s. Macdonald used organisations like the Women's League and legislation like the 1937 Act to unpick the complexity of the empire and the allure that the 'perfect' or 'healthy' body seemed to have. Macdonald's work was the perfect complement to the work of Caroline Daley, Carey Watt and others, with the proviso that it was concerned with the political element of transnational physical culture. Macdonald's work is also one of few studies on physical culture to provide political comparisons between nations.⁶⁷ The transnational study of physical culture was well established prior to this time but intricate case studies comparing political decisions in different territories were lacking. Later works have attempted to replicate Macdonald's work in comparing political systems, such as a recent book on Irish physical culture.⁶⁸ Yet despite the interest in political physical culture, historians have preferred in-depth studies of one nation rather than the comparative approach favoured by Macdonald.⁶⁹

IV

The political history of physical culture was a rich area for historians. Such work added a strong methodological backbone to the field and, more importantly, provided a starting point for historians interested in furthering the study of French, German, British, Soviet, Laotian, etc. history. In a sense, this 'wave' of studies helped legitimise a field that was previously sporadic in nature. Concurrent with and subsequent to this wave has been a range of studies interested in the identities and commerce connected to physical culture. In 1986 Stephen Hardy published an article imploring historians to take seriously the study of sporting entrepreneurs. Since that time, the depth and nuance of

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 133–66.

⁶⁷ Charlotte Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful, and Modern: National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935–1960* (Vancouver, 2013).

⁶⁸ Connor Heffernan, *The History of Physical Culture in Ireland* (London, 2020).

⁶⁹ Rachel Louise Moran, *Governing Bodies* (Philadelphia, 2018).

studies on sporting entrepreneurs has grown.⁷⁰ The study of physical culture entrepreneurs has also grown, but more work is needed. Beginning with Sandow a number of books, articles and dissertations have been written on physical culture entrepreneurs. A leading charge in this regard was undoubtedly John Fair's monograph on Bob Hoffman and York Barbell which, from the 1930s to 1980s, was America's most influential fitness manufacturer. Doctoral work by Dominic Morais developed Fair's study by discussing the 'brand community' Hoffman cultivated with his consumers.⁷¹ As was also found in Kimberly Beckwith's study of American barbell manufacturer Alan Calvert, entrepreneurs helped create strong bonds with American men extending far beyond the typical consumer/producer relationship.⁷²

The study of marketing, which has imported a great deal from business history, has become a noticeable trend in physical culture histories. Work by Dominic Morais on Eugen Sandow and Jacqueline Reich on Charles Atlas discussed the ability of entrepreneurs to cultivate definitive fitness brands centred on strength, masculinity and an abundance of health.⁷³ Jan Todd and Ben Pollack's study of Earle Liederman examined Liederman's use of mail order courses in 1920s America and his ability to exploit generational fears about masculinity and modernity.⁷⁴ Subsequent work on nineteenth-century health promoters has examined the messages and means physical culturists used to sell products and services.⁷⁵ Doctoral work by Ben Pollack on Jack Lalanne, who hosted a popular fitness television show in twentieth-century America, advanced the study of physical culture commercialism in new mediums like television.⁷⁶ As a final note on the business history of physical culture, a tangential emerging field has been institutional histories. In 2019, Jan Todd, Terry Todd and Jason Shurley published a history of strength coaching in America which highlighted the intersection between physical culture entrepreneurs, sporting coaches and administrators. The book stressed the importance private entrepreneurs like Bob Hoffman and Joe Weider had in bringing gym equipment, and strength coaches, into schools,

⁷⁰ Stephen Hardy, 'Entrepreneurs, organizations, and the sport marketplace: subjects in search of historians', *Journal of Sport History*, 13/1 (1986), pp. 14–33.

⁷¹ Fair, *Muscle town USA*; Dominic Gray Morais, 'Strength in numbers: strength and health brand community from 1932–1964' (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2015).

⁷² Kimberly Ayn Beckwith, 'Building strength: Alan Calvert, the Milo Bar-Bell Company, and the modernization of American weight training' (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

⁷³ Dominic G. Morais, 'Branding iron: Eugen Sandow's "Modern" marketing strategies, 1887–1925', *Journal of Sport History*, 40/ 2 (2013), pp. 193–214; Jacqueline Reich, 'The world's most perfectly developed man: Charles Atlas, physical culture, and the inscription of American masculinity', *Men and Masculinities*, 12/4 (2010), pp. 444–61.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Pollack and Janice Todd, 'Before Charles Atlas: Earle Liederman, the 1920s king of mail-order muscle', *Journal of Sport History*, 44/3 (2017), pp. 399–420.

⁷⁵ Conor Heffernan, 'He ate and pumped: the rise and fall of D. L. Dowd, America's forgotten fitness entrepreneur', *Journal of Sport History*, 47/2 (2020), pp. 143–60.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Richard Pollack, 'Becoming Jack LaLanne' (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2018).

colleges, universities and sporting facilities.⁷⁷ Written on the American context, the work traces the institutional adoption of physical culture practices by sport teams and the resultant strength coach industry emerging from it.

Equally, if perhaps not more important than the above trend, has been the study of race and sexuality years. Of particular interest is Shannon Walsh's research on nineteenth-century physical culture in America. Previous studies on this period have often noted the overlap between physical culture and eugenic groups (or interests like social Darwinism, martial theory, Lamarckism or phrenology). While such connections have been dealt with as a side-interest or as part of the history, Walsh's (2020) monograph placed them as a prime object of focus. Drawing on a substantive background in theatre studies, Walsh discussed the performance of whiteness fostered in physical culture workouts. Through an examination of popular and institutional physical culture, Walsh unpacked the nativist and racial undertones embedded in workouts and, more importantly, drew parallels to the modern age.⁷⁸ This was not the first time the racist nature of western physical culture has been discussed but it was the most substantive. Soon to be published work by Ava Purkiss will provide the first detailed study on black physical culture in the United States and help to shift conversations away from the often unproblematised nature of white physical culture.⁷⁹ Prior to Purkiss, research on black physical culture has predominantly focused on individual gym owners, athletes or schools.⁸⁰

Walsh and Purkiss's work raises some interesting questions about the potential to decolonise the history of physical culture. A relatively new turn in broader historical debates, the concept of decolonising history has been described by one historian 'as making historians aware of and committed to addressing the disproportionate focus on Eurocentric history in the profession'.⁸¹ Although the history of physical culture has focused on Asian and African physical culture at times, there has been an over-privileging of histories on European gymnastics and callisthenic systems in the colonial world. Maya Talmon-Chvaicer's work on Brazilian capoeira, Shohei Sato's global history of judo or Udo Moenig's monograph on *Taekwondo* highlight the existence of rich histories independent of European or American physical culture.⁸² While

⁷⁷ Jason P. Shurley, Jan Todd, and Terry Todd, *Strength Coaching in America: A History of the Innovation That Transformed Sports* (Austin, 2019).

⁷⁸ Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (New York, 2020).

⁷⁹ Ava Purkiss, *Fit Citizens: A History of Black Women's Exercise, 1900–1960* (Chapel Hill, forthcoming).

⁸⁰ Louis Moore, 'Fit for citizenship: black sparring masters, gymnasium owners, and the white body, 1825–1886', *The Journal of African American History*, 96/4 (2011), pp. 448–73.

⁸¹ Emma Hunter, Elisabeth Leake, Sarah Miller-Davenport, Amanda Behm, Su Lin Lewis and Christienna Fryar, 'Decolonising history: enquiry and practice: conversation with Amanda Behm, Christienna Fryar, Elisabeth Leake, Su Lin Lewis and Sarah Miller-Davenport', *History Workshop Journal*, 89 (2020), pp. 169–91.

⁸² Maya Talmon-Chvaicer, *The Hidden History of Capoeira: A Collision of Cultures in the Brazilian Battle Dance* (Austin, 2008); Shohei Sato, 'The sportification of judo: global convergence and

interactions with the exercise trends discussed here existed, it is now time for historians to take account of these practices. This can be done through the study of individuals or systems of training. Research on K. V. Iyer, an Indian bodybuilder from the 1920s and 1930s, explained how Iyer married his yogic practices from India with his understanding of American bodybuilding.⁸³ Neither was held in more importance than the other; both existed simultaneously. Shohei Sato's global history of judo, and Mark Singleton's previously mentioned study of yoga showcased the importance of studying non-European forms of exercise during the era of physical culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Physical culture was, as Sebastian Conrad has argued, a truly global phenomenon. More effort is likely to be placed on non-European or American histories in future.⁸⁴

Walsh and Purkiss's works on race helped disrupt many of the themes traditionally discussed by historians who, although noting physical culture's racist paradigms, rarely scrutinise them fully. This desire to problematize and discuss other experiences of physical culture is also present in those works discussing physical culture and sexuality. Early works on physical culture have noted its appeal to gay consumers and, indeed, the ability of physical culturists covertly to market products to these groups.⁸⁵ As a subfield defined often by its rigid and hyper-realised gender stereotypes, physical culture messages have been aggressively heterosexual. One example of this was Bob Hoffman of York Barbell, the man studied by John Fair, who routinely used homophobic slurs to denigrate his competitors in his own strength magazines. Hoffman did so in 1950s and 1960s America, at a time when his competitor Joe Weider published soft-core pornography for men under the guise of physical culture.⁸⁶ The simultaneous welcoming and derision of same-sex groups in physical culture has rarely been explored. A much-needed exception is David Johnson's 2019 work *Buying Gay*. Focused on the gay interest magazines of the mid to late twentieth-century in America, Johnson's book provided a much-needed examination of same-sex desire in the world of physical culture which, despite being commented on frequently, has rarely been the subject of great scrutiny.⁸⁷

Substantive studies on race and sexuality mark two new, and much-needed, developments in the field of physical culture. Another clear

evolution', *Journal of Global History*, 8/2 (2013), pp. 299–317; Udo Moenig, *Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport* (London, 2015).

⁸³ Aishwarya Ramachandran and Conor Heffernan, 'A distinctly Indian body? K. V. Iyer and physical culture in 1930s India', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 36/12 (2019), pp. 1053–75.

⁸⁴ Conrad, 'Globalizing the beautiful body'.

⁸⁵ Jim Elledge, 'Eugen Sandow's gift to gay men', *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 18/4 (2011), pp. 14–17.

⁸⁶ David K. Johnson, 'Physique pioneers: the politics of 1960s gay consumer culture', *Journal of Social History*, 43/4 (2010), pp. 867–92.

⁸⁷ David K. Johnson, *Buying Gay: How Physique Entrepreneurs Sparked a Movement* (New York, 2019).

area of note relates to performance and art. Several art historians have, in recent years, used the images of physical culturists, and their live performances, for research. Given that physical culturists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often mimicked the poses of Greco-Roman sculptures, this is perhaps not surprising. Ana Carden-Coyne and Peter Millar have both showcased the strong classical links between physical culturists and the ancient world.⁸⁸ Anthea Callen's 2019 *Looking at Men* drew from Callen's works in art history to discuss both the practice of looking at, and the symbolism of, naked male bodies.⁸⁹ Physical culturists, for obvious reasons, provided ample subject matter. Research has not been limited to the canvas. John Fair and David Chapman's recent collaborative work, *Muscles in the Movies*, discussed the socio-cultural impact that muscled male and female actors have had on European and American society. A key finding from their monograph was that these muscled physiques were both projections of a society's idealised gender norms but also a revelation about the anxieties of the age.⁹⁰ Often the heavily muscled frame was popularised at a time of deep social and cultural instability.

The body itself has also been a subject of scrutiny. Performance scholar Broderick Chow has published a series of articles on the lived experience of the physical culturist. In much the same way that sport historians have been critiqued for neglecting the lived experience of playing sport, in favour of its social and cultural history, Chow has highlighted the oftentimes 'absent body' in physical culture histories.⁹¹ Beginning with a simple question – what did it mean to be a physical culturist? – Chow's work discussed the embodied knowledge inherent in physical culture practices. He thereby examined the impact training the body had on individual's sense of self and communities. Scrutinising the repetitive nature of exercise, especially in the early twentieth century, Chow viewed physical culture as a practice wherein individual identities, thoughts and gendered notions of self were reinforced. Given that performance scholars have already used professional wrestling as a means of examining embodied selves and their societies it is likely that more will be done in this area.⁹² In fact, subsequent work inspired by Chow has reiterated the importance of the physical, lived body, in the study of history.⁹³ In this regard, Chow benefited from previous studies on

⁸⁸ Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford, 2009); Peter J. Miller, 'The imaginary antiquity of physical culture', *The Classical Outlook*, 93/1 (2018), pp. 21–31.

⁸⁹ Anthea Callen, *Looking at Men: Anatomy, Masculinity and the Modern Male Body* (New York, 2018).

⁹⁰ Fair and Chapman, *Muscles in the Movies*.

⁹¹ Broderick D. V. Chow, 'A professional body: remembering, repeating and working out masculinities in fin-de-siècle physical culture', *Performance Research*, 20/5 (2015), pp. 30–41.

⁹² Broderick Chow, Eero Laine and Claire Warden (eds), *Performance and Professional Wrestling* (London, 2016).

⁹³ Connor Heffernan, 'Body projects as a historical phenomenon: Irish physical culture and the body as process', *Rethinking History*, 24/3–4 (2020), pp. 417–41.

the ‘free dance’ movement of the early twentieth century, specifically research on individuals like Isadora Duncan, Rudolf Laban or Ida Rubinstein.⁹⁴ Other promising methodologies are also being used, such as oral history and the history of emotions, but the nexus between art and lived performance is likely to have a profound impact on the field.⁹⁵

As a final point in this regard, substantial efforts have also been made in the realm of public and/or digital history, especially in English-speaking countries. Leading the charge in this regard have been Jan Todd, Terry Todd and the Stark Center. Since 2014 the Stark Center has worked with workout equipment manufacturer Rogue Fitness to digitise the Center’s materials and produce documentaries on the history of physical culture for the general public. At the time of writing, Rogue has produced several documentaries ranging from individual biographies of strongmen and women to socio-cultural examinations of stone-lifting in Scotland, Iceland and the Basque Region.⁹⁶ Documentaries have also, at times, been coordinated with modern strength contests like the Arnold Strongman Classic. Created in 2002 by Arnold Schwarzenegger and his business partner Jim Lorimer, the Classic has made several efforts to integrate the history of physical culture into a contest setting. The impetus for this has come from Jan and Terry Todd, who have helped organised the event since its creation. Thus, audiences have seen strength athletes lift objects modelled on the barbells, dumbbells and objects used a century before. Rogue’s documentaries have also tied into this public history approach as evidenced by a documentary on Louis ‘Apollon’ Uni (1862–1928) whose ‘Apollon Wheels’ barbell inspired a modern version at the Classic. Likewise, Rogue’s documentary on strongwoman Katie Sandwina (1884–1952) coincided with the creation of a Sandwina Trophy at the Classic for female competitors.

Such collaborations have advanced the general public’s interest in this field, spawning multiple ‘copycat’ documentaries online. Significantly, the Stark/Rogue collaboration has resulted in several ambitious digital history projects. Digitised projects include the personal scrapbooks of several physical culturists, personal correspondences and dozens of scanned magazines including the entire run of America’s first weightlifting magazine *Strength* (1914–30).⁹⁷ The Stark Center is not the only repository to offer scanned physical culture materials – Ball State University has digitised *Physical Culture* magazine and the Bibliothèque

⁹⁴ Patricia Vertinsky, ‘Isadora goes to Europe as the “Muse of Modernism”: modern dance, gender, and the active female body’, *Journal of Sport History*, 37/1 (2010), pp. 19–39; Paola Crespi, ‘Rhythmanalysis in gymnastics and dance: Rudolf Bode and Rudolf Laban’, *Body and Society*, 20/3–4 (2014), pp. 30–50; Lynn Garafola, *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown, 2005).

⁹⁵ Tolga Ozyurtcu and Jan Todd, ‘Critical mass: oral history, innovation theory, and the fitness legacy of the muscle beach scene’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 37/16 (2020), pp. 1696–1714.

⁹⁶ Such documentaries are freely available on YouTube and the ‘Rogue Index.’ See <<https://www.roguefitness.com/theindex/>>.

⁹⁷ ‘Digital Library’, The H. J. Lutchter Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports. Available at <<https://www.starkcenter.org/research-2/digital-library/>>.

nationale de France offers scanned copies of *La Culture Physique* – but it is the most substantive.⁹⁸ A new project, recently launched, has been the *Strongman Project*. Created in collaboration with Rogue Fitness, the *Strongman Project* is a digital repository for thousands of scanned materials relating to strongmen and women from the past century and a half.⁹⁹ Coupled with materials offered on Rogue's own website, 'The Rogue Index', it marks an ambitious and worthwhile project for the dissemination of previously unseen materials.¹⁰⁰ The Covid-19 Pandemic, and the difficulties historians faced in continuing their work, has reiterated the value such projects have for researchers. Promises that the *Strongman Project* will be regularly updated with new materials bode well for historians and the public history of physical culture.

V

Twenty years ago, the term Physical Culture was scarcely known. Nowadays, everyone understands its meaning ...¹⁰¹

Feeling confident about his chosen profession gymnast Alexander Wallace declared in 1908 that no man, woman or child in England was ignorant of physical culture and its importance. Tempting though it is to declare a similar state of affairs for historians, a more truthful statement is that the field has grown in respectability over the past two decades. More than one historian studying physical culture has recorded the labelling of the subject as unworthy of academic attention in the 1980s.¹⁰² It is hard to imagine a similar reaction in modern times. The evolution from sporadic studies in the 1980s to sustained works has been slow, gradual, but sustained. More work needs to be done on individual biographies, countries and trends but work continues in all three areas. As health, and healthism, becomes more prominent in daily life, it is likely that the scrutiny of historical health trends will become all the more important. This has certainly been the case in the study of kinesiology.¹⁰³

There is room for optimism within the field but also a need for scrutiny. Jan Todd has previously noted the at times sloppy historical approach seen in general physical culture histories. As Todd noted, several historians have failed to appreciate the importance of trickery and fakery when it comes to physical culture commerce.¹⁰⁴ Such struggles are not unique to

⁹⁸ 'Physical Culture Magazine', Ball State University. Available at <<https://www.dmr.bsu.edu/digital/collection/PhyCul>>; 'La Culture physique', *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. Available at <<https://www.gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb344303451/date>>.

⁹⁹ The Strongman Project. Available at <<https://www.strongmanproject.com/>>.

¹⁰⁰ 'The 'Rogue Index'', Rogue Fitness. Available at <<https://www.roguefitness.com/theindex/>>.

¹⁰¹ A. Wallace Jones, *Fifty Exercises for Health and Strength* (London, c.1908), p. 9.

¹⁰² Todd, 'Reflections'.

¹⁰³ Mark Dyreson and Jaime Schultz, 'The history of physical activity in the past, present, and future of kinesiology's big questions, hot topics, and prospects for integration', *Kinesiology Review*, 10/3 (2021), pp. 248–56.

¹⁰⁴ Todd, 'Reflections'.

physical culture but they provide room for caution and critique. Shannon Walsh and D. K. Johnson's works, in particular, have highlighted the need for historians to engage deeply with issues of race and sexuality beyond overarching statements about physical culture's relations to these areas. Likewise, Chow's work on performance has challenged historians not to forget the corporal, lived experience that physical culture entailed. The field has moved from the proverbial 'thirty-eight-pound weakling' of the Charles Atlas advertisements of the 1930s to a strong and robust frame. More work is now needed on 'fleshing out' the biographies of still understudied individuals while simultaneously producing the radical approaches needed on race, gender and sexuality. Given the subject matter at hand, strenuous work and repetitive labour will no doubt be needed. One suspects the motto 'no pain, no gain' is particularly apt for future endeavours.

PEER REVIEW

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